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## **PRESS RELEASE**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**January 16, 2003**

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# **SURPRISE WOMAN PLEADS GUILTY TO THEFT OF \$80,000 IN FEDERAL BENEFITS**

**PHOENIX, ARIZONA** -- The United States Attorney's Office for the District of Arizona announced today that ROZANA K. MURRIETA, 54, of Surprise, Arizona, pled guilty to Theft of Government Property in Phoenix, Arizona.

MURRIETA was indicted on two counts of violating Title 18 of the United States Code, Section 641, in connection with her misleading the Veterans' Administration and the United States Office of Personnel Management into paying at least \$79,281 in survivor benefits and retirement benefits to a deceased individual, which funds MURRIETA then appropriated for herself. MURRIETA's mother, who was a retired federal employee and herself the widow of a qualifying veteran, was receiving retirement and veterans' survivor benefits at the time of her death in July, 1998. Unaware at that time of the mother's death, the Veterans' Administration and the Office of Personnel Management continued to pay benefits via direct deposit into a bank account in the mother's name. MURRIETA had control over that account. Both federal agencies continued paying benefits to the decedent until they became aware in mid-2001 of her death through a periodic matching of government death records against beneficiary lists, a process intended to detect fraud. During her plea hearing, MURRIETA admitted to deliberately concealing her mother's death

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from the federal agencies in order to continue receiving the benefits, to which she admitted she was not entitled. MURRIETA admitted transferring the payments from her mother's bank account to her own and spending the funds on herself and her family.

A conviction for Theft of Government Property carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison, a \$250,000 fine or both.

Sentencing is set before Judge Roslyn O. Silver on March 31, 2003.

The investigation in this case was conducted by the United States Department of Veterans' Affairs, Office of the Inspector General.

The prosecution is being handled by John Joseph Tuchi, Assistant United States Attorney, District of Arizona, Phoenix, Arizona.

CASE NUMBER: CR-02-934-PHX-ROS  
RELEASE NUMBER: 2003-006

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